

When the survey was conducted in the Summer of 2001, 16% of the RNs and 14.4% of the LPNs who responded expected to retire by the Summer of 2003. There is some evidence to suggest that the current economic slow down and the poor performance of the stock market (important to those close to retirement) may have delayed those plans for some nurses. The average vacancy rates for RNs and LPNs across the state actually declined between 2000 and 2002 without a substantial increase in the number of new nurses entering the profession, suggesting that the total size of the nursing workforce has not changed appreciably in the last 2 years.

The warning that should be gleaned from Table 18 is that more than one-third (approximately 36%) of the current nursing workforce over the age of 45 is planning to retire by the Summer of 2006. Depending on what happens in the general economy and in the stock market, there may be a large and rapid exodus of our most experienced nurses in the next few years. On the other hand, if employers actively address this issue by developing retention programs and gradual retirement programs some of the problem might be avoidable. The basic demographic reasons for the exodus will not be changed, however.

Table 18. Number of years Veteran RNs and LPNs expect to remain in the nursing workforce

Number of years to go between current age and expected retirement age:	RNs		LPNs	
	N	%	N	%
2 years or less	40	16.0	27	14.4
3 – 5 years	51	20.4	41	21.8
6 – 7 years	34	13.6	19	10.1
8 – 10 years	37	14.8	19	10.1
11 – 15 years	27	10.8	35	18.6
16 years or more	18	7.2	17	9.0
missing	43	17.2	30	16.0
Totals	250	100	188	100
χ^2 p-value	0.1419			

Note: Chi-square values were run on an abbreviated table that did not contain missing values.

A regional analysis of length of time in job, number of years to remain in direct patient care, expected retirement age and the number of years until retirement found that the results were essentially the same for both veteran RNs and veteran LPNs in all regions of the state.

Summary

We surveyed ‘veteran’ nurses in North Carolina – RNs and LPNs with an active license to practice who were between the ages of 46 to 79 in the summer of 2001. The majority of those nurses were actively employed in nursing positions at the time, but when employment activity